

Singing the Songs of the Season

Sermon-Based Study Guide
Good Shepherd Presbyterian Church

Luke 1.39-56
December 8th & 9th, 2012

Prepared by Rev. Curtis Bronzan, ThM
curtis@gspc.org | 562/493.2553 x115

I. Connecting With One Another

When was the last time you (or someone you know) burst out in song - or cheering? What did you sing? And what prompted your singing?

II. Introduction to this Study

Last week we began our Advent series, "Singing the Songs of the Season" by looking at the prophet Isaiah's song, which foreshadowed Israel's celebration of the "Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace."

This week, we see how this Son was given: through the miraculous pregnancy of a young woman who recognized God's blessing, not only for her personally, but for the fulfillment of prophecy that will extend from generation to generation - indeed, even to us!

III. Study the Text

- a. While we are focusing on Luke 1.39-56, it's good to have some context to these verses (even though you're probably very familiar with them!).

Begin by reading Luke 1.26-38. Spend a few moments meditating on this passage, then continue on, reading verses 39-40. Notice that Mary "got ready and hurried to a town in the hill country of Judea." While it could be that Mary was simply excited to celebrate Elizabeth's unlikely - and her own miraculous - pregnancy, there could be another reason for her visit. Recall that in the first century, a pregnancy out of wedlock would bring about ridicule and shame, and may have even been punishable by death.

Which of these two reasons would you initially assume prompted Mary to "get ready and hurry" to Elizabeth's? How does the other possible reason expand your understanding of this story?

- b. Read again verses 39-40, continuing on through verse 45.

Whatever reason Mary visited Elizabeth, their reunion was one of rejoicing! At no time did Elizabeth question Mary's pregnancy or hesitate to show her the utmost of hospitality. In fact, it is upon Mary's arrival that Elizabeth feels John the Baptist leap in her belly and she is filled with the Holy Spirit. After this, she proclaims blessing!

Why do you think Luke is careful to note that the filling of the Holy Spirit preempts her proclamation of blessing?

The writer of Luke also authored Acts, the early history of the burgeoning Christian movement. Read Acts 2.1-4, noting especially what happens immediately after the apostles' filling by the Holy Spirit. What connections can you make between Acts 2.1-4 and Luke 1.41-45?

- c. Read Mary's song in verses 46-55. Mary's song of response to God's miracle is traditionally referred to as "The Magnificat," a name which comes from a Latin translation of the text which begins, "Magnificat anima mea Dominum" ("my soul magnifies the Lord").

Pretend, for a moment, that you're unfamiliar with this story. What jumps out at you in this verses? Why?

- d. Read 1st Samuel 2.1-10, which is very similar to Mary's song. The "lyrics" aren't the only similarity, however. Both Mary and Hannah are referred to as God's "handmaiden" or "maidservant," pointing to their willingness to serve God, and further, both women see the birth of their children as a way of God's purposes are being fulfilled.

In what ways have you modeled a "song" you've sung after one you've heard before? Have worship songs or hymns helped give voice to your praise? How about passages from Scripture?

- e. In verse 48, Mary sings, "God has been mindful of the humble state of his servant." Many have assumed that Mary is referring to herself as "his servant," which makes perfect sense! Biblical scholars, however, are quick to point out that her song of praise is not simply in response to God's gift of a child to *her*, but rather, that God is fulfilling His plan for *Israel* (probably the servant Mary's referring to). Through Israel, of course, God fulfills His plan to the world! (see Acts 1.1-8)

One such scholar writes, "She is blessed, not because she is pregnant, or because of any intrinsic holiness or merit but because God's salvific purposes are being accomplished through her. Mary thus becomes one in a long line of recipients of God's grace and mercy in salvation history."

How has God used events in your life - whether good or bad - to reveal His grace and mercy, leading you to receive His salvation?

- f. Read verses 51-55 again. Why on earth do you think Mary connects the fulfillment of God's promises with what, in our day and age, might be called "social justice"? What does Jesus' birth and the Kingdom of God have to do with such things?

To think through this from another angle, read the Beatitudes in Matthew 5.1-13 or Jesus' "song" in Luke 4.14-21.

IV. Reflect and Respond

- a. Has someone even shown you hospitality like Elizabeth did for Mary? What could have happened if they didn't? How was their hospitable spirit a gift of grace to you?
- b. In what ways have the filling of the Holy Spirit enabled you to proclaim blessing? This need not be a big, profound proclamation like Elizabeth's was (which, important though it was, was only four sentences!).
- c. In Matthew 12.34, Jesus states, "For out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks." What types of things do you talk about? At work? At home? At school?
How does Jesus' statement reveal what your heart is overflowing with?
Does this further reveal the things you're filling your heart with?
- d. How could our "song" this Christmas season be connected to the Kingdom of justice that God is birthing among us? Could our giving further that Kingdom as well? How so?

V. Pray

Spend some time in prayer:

- a. Lift up our gatherings this Advent season, specifically that the many folks who may be joining us for the first time would be lovingly welcomed into our church, and that as they join us, God would draw them into a connection with Him,
- b. Pray that we, as individuals and as a community, would join Mary in her Magnificat, singing the good news of God's mercy,
- c. For Good Shepherd's pastors, staff, elders and deacons, as they seek to lead our church.